**Life at Home – Cleaning, Helping Mum, Food, Bedtime, Having Babies at Home**

*These are Miss Lily Head’s own words (1905-1997) transcribed from a Dictaphone by Susan Monson. They give an insight into life in the early 1900’s.*

**Cleaning**We had a big room for the washing with a fireplace. We used to be bathed out there. She (mother) used to put this rug down on the floor and light the fire in the copper for the water and put this rug on the floor and the bath and that’s how she bathed us. How she usually managed that was that she’d do our hair and all. The water was taken out of the copper in bucketfuls and put into the bath and then she’d wash our hair and bath us and give each one to my Dad, as she got them done, to dry and take them in by the other fire.

My father helped, he always cleaned the pans and cleaned the shoes, got all the vegetables in out of the garden, quite a job for eight of us – six children. And when it was the water being pumped up, he was always went and pumped the water up. It was a well first of all out in the front of those houses, we wound it up. And afterwards we had a pump at the back.

Dad told us about work, the cattle and everything. Before he could ever come in he always used to get off his boots and ask for his slippers at the door because of course he was filthy sometimes. We had a tank of rainwater and he’d turn this tap and scrub his boots off with the bass broom outside and then he would go in the back place and wash, hands and everything. The baby was always crying to go to him but he would never take her until he had done all this because you see you get all sorts of things, ring-worm anything. But I think with the washing of it all off like that it does make it safe and he always washed in Lifebuoy soap, that was supposed to be the right kind of thing, to make sure. There was disinfectant of course. I do like the smell of the soap.

It is the wisest plan with children because little ones do pick things up quickly, don’t they. His clothes were never really dirty because he wore those khaki coats, he never went to work without it, he’d have been in a filthy state if he had as you can imagine. Cattle, sheep and all, I mean you’re treading about in everything aren’t you?

The whole day was spent washing (on wash day). My brother and me always quarrelled on Monday mornings because mum was lighting the boiler. We always fought at breakfast because, you see, we were able to. If she had been in there we couldn’t. She was out in the place where there was a fire and a copper, lighting the copper to start the washing. I never forgot it and he never forgets it either. When she came back she knew we had been arguing but it was too late to bother. No good telling us off when it was all over. I think we did it deliberately, it was a chance to do something we weren’t able to do anytime else.

We had all white bed quilts the old-fashioned way, like candlewick with all bobbles and that round them. We washed them all in the bath. The only thing we ever had was a mangle. It all got done somehow.

All the lamps had to be cleaned every morning and filled. It was all paraffin, came out of a big can. We had beautiful lamps – I should never have thrown them away but I did, when I cleaned up my father’s house, and all his tools and that. I really had to throw some of them away. Coming down to a small place like this, you can’t keep everything. But I often think I was silly I should have kept more. But there you are, you don’t do it, because you never think you’re going to need it.

**Helping Mum**My mum never had anyone to do the work with but when we were old enough we had to sew our buttons on. She’d teach us to. Evenings in the winter were spent teaching us to make buttonholes and all sorts of things. Teach the younger ones the alphabet and the times tables.

We came home from school in the dinner hour and helped, watching the baby in the high chair, feeding baby and later the baby did it itself, playing with the baby so it was ready to go to sleep in the afternoon. Mum made dinner ready.

After school, if mum wanted anything like the brass and silver done she would put it ready and show us. It depended what she had to do. There might be the baby to look after while she finished off dad’s tea. We were always taught to lay the tea. We couldn’t do dinner *(lunch)* because it had to be ready when we came home from school.

In the evening it was all little bits of sewing – your own bits of mending - or learning to knit, showing the younger ones how to knit. We had big wool and big needles. We all sat at the table so that young ones could learn and join in. We sewed on our buttons and as soon as mum had taught us we showed the little ones. The she’d see if we had done it properly. That’s how we learned to do things, not at school. We did bits there but it wasn’t enough.

**Food**

I can never remember my mum, when we came home from school, without her having a clean pinafore on and ready for when my dad came home. He came home about 5.00.pm., unless he was late at market, and had a cooked meal that was taken out at lunch time. We had bread and jam. At breakfast we had eggs and bacon because we had the pigs and chickens and the bacon and that. I couldn’t afford to have the breakfast now even if I wanted.

If dad was in at the right time he had his meal with us, put on a plate on top of a saucepan to keep hot after dinnertime. Sometimes the baby wanted a bit, it could see it was something different, and he’d give her a little bit. We said grace before you started and said your grace after and asked to get down.

My father had a big meat safe, Jack Barnett’s father made it, with all the mesh in front so that the milk – you see there wasn’t proper larders – all the milk and meat and all could go in there so that nothing could get in them; to see there were no flies or anything. I’ve still got a muslin circle with bobbles, to go over the milk, there was no other way of keeping it nice. There were an awful lot of flies around in those days. None of the things to get rid of them. There were those things you hung up for them to stick on. Still it didn’t seem to do us any harm. All this fuss today, I often wonder if it is necessary.

We had chickens and we had a pig so there was a ham kept for Christmas. Mr Lavington always gave them a turkey, all his workmen. My father always used to have the value of that in a sirloin of beef because he had two big for cockerels for us. So you can't say we were poor! We had that ham and 12 lb sirloin of beef.

In those days people got the milk from farms so a milk man wasn’t a thing that was really necessary. You didn’t need it if the farmers were there. In those days the farmers were glad to get rid of what they called the skimmed milk. It gradually came that we had milkmen, after the milk started to be taken away and that.

We never bought a vegetables, my father grew everything in the garden. We had every fruit in the garden that he grew barring strawberries. And you know the old hut round Werg, in those days that was a market garden. Her father used to grow everything. My father used to go round there to get russet apples because that was the only place where there was a tree of russets, to keep for us, and all our strawberries he went round there and bought and everything else he grew himself in the garden.

They used to gather enough corn, when they had cleared the fields, to feed the chickens all winter. A lot of the work was social, that’s when you met people. You’d meet in the holidays with the children to pick wild flowers or blackberrying. There were wild raspberries, anything. Then there were crab apples to make the apple jelly. Some of them gathered acorns. Really life was quite hectic in a way and quite friendly because, you see, everybody was doing these things. That’s why the women didn’t really need to go to work, they made the money from all sorts of things. They got nuts from Thickets Road in September. My dad used to put them in a big flower pot and put them down in the damp ground and that kept them, they didn’t go dry. Then he got them up at Christmas. You couldn’t have afforded those things if you didn’t get them that way.

There was water glass for keeping eggs, we made this mixture and poured it over them so the couple of months when the chickens weren’t laying you had eggs – with the shells on. Sometimes you pickled them with the shells off. The beans were salted but you didn’t do that much because of all the different kinds of greens there were in the garden: savoy cabbage, sprouts, parsnips – everybody grew them. We were allowed Swedes from the fields. This made a good life.

Mum made all her own cakes, big cakes cut unless it was Sunday and then she’d make some fancy ones. Through the week it was just the ordinary currents and sultanas, things like that; orange and lemon ones sometimes. Tea was an ordinary meal. We always had a really big lunch meal with boiled puddings; apples and rhubarb and all sorts of boiled pudding.

When working for Mrs Leigh she could make a steak and kidney pudding and a boiled pudding for lunch time. They say you put on weight with that but I don’t think that’s what puts weight on. If you’re using up the energy, this is the thing isn’t it, what you do I mean. We had to walk everywhere so you couldn’t put on much weight.

**Evenings and Bedtime**

We had proper candlesticks in special places where you knew where to find them. We just went up and lit them. They were put in special places so that the children couldn’t get near them, otherwise, you see, children would play with things like that.

Of an evening in the winter it was eight o clock bedtime. There was a tin of sweets, Dad bought them from the market and mum put them in the tin and gave them one every night before we went upstairs. We said our prayers downstairs so that mum knew we’d said them. With several, when they go upstairs you’re not going to know what they’re doing. She then knew we’d done it all.

The biggest one told us a story. Mum had done it so long she thought it was quite time the biggest should read them a story – to the younger ones. Then she was allowed not to go to bed so early.

**Having Babies at Home**

When my mother had my youngest sister Mrs Whorl came and looked after us. There were usually one or two women in the village who could do that kind of thing. She looked after my mother. Only my brother and youngest sister were born here, all of us others were born away from here. I came here when I was six years old. The day before I was born it was a nice day and my mum washed all the quilts.

All six babies were born at home. She never had a doctor until the last one. When the Dr came he said “Clever Woman, I don’t know why they want to keep making us come, it’s not necessary.” And my mum said “No, it’s the first time I’ve ever had a doctor to any of them.” That was a rule that came, that a doctor must call. I think far too much fuss is made, after all it is nature isn’t it? Unless there’s complications.”

When mothers had babies in those days they went down to the church with the nurse and had prayers and that and then they could go out. Babies were taken on a Sunday afternoon to be Christened at 3.00.pm. Everyone had a Christening robe, that was a very smart occasion for the children. We had the proper Christening gown, I still have it. It’s gone round all the family: Jane, John Bower’s daughter wanted it. Sometimes there is a bit of trouble as both families have Christening gowns so they say they don’t want it and it saves arguments.

You could always tell the children whose mothers could sew because they always looked smart. I used to make my skirts into kilts for them (nieces) and knit jumpers. My mum was good at sewing. You always had to wear a pinafore on top of your clothes. You wore one at school so it didn’t matter what your skirt was like so long as you looked neat and tidy. Mind you, it did make some washing and ironing.

When you think of what the mothers did, they worked ever so hard, much harder than now. There was no electricity. My Mum was the first one to have gas. We could have gas in Minal village if we could get twelve names. And when they got to our house nobody had put their name down ‘cos they’d come down the lane looking round ‘cos there wasn’t many houses there. They did get twelve in the end and we were the first in Minal to have gas. Electricity came after, that wasn’t put in till years later, after I was grown up.

Mr Soames’ family had a nanny. My mum turned up dresses Mrs Soames gave her from her own children. Mrs Soames had a sewing class once a week.